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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002894

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SUBJECT: SHI'A PARLIAMENTARY MALCONTENTS VENT ABOUT GROUP
OF FOUR, SADRISTS, AND IRAN

REF: BAGHDAD 2877 (IRAQI LEADERS REACH AGREEMENT)

Classified By: Classified By Political Counselor Matt Tueller. Reason:
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Separate discussions with former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, nominally a member of PM al-Maliki's Da'wa party, and senior legislators from the Fadhila party revealed deep skepticism over the current government's ability to achieve meaningful progress and interest in forming a new political bloc to challenge the Group of Four alignment. Al-Jaafari and the Fadhila reps were critical of the Iraqi Islamic Supreme Council (ISCI) for its close ties to Iran and for damaging the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the sect-based coalition which propelled Shi'a politicians to power in 2005 elections but has since unraveled. Fadhila leaders poured scorn on Iran, which they identified as the source of many of Iraq's problems and complained that the GOI had done little to counter unhelpful or even aggressive Iranian acts such as its shelling of Iraqi territory. Identified by Fadhila reps as the Sadrist's choice as next Iraqi Prime Minister, al-Jaafari maintained that most of the al-Sadr movement can still be directed into the mainstream and that radicals within the movement seize upon unemployment, poverty, and "indiscriminate" Coalition attacks to broaden their appeal among Shi'a. Al-Jaafari expressed a wish to visit Washington within a fortnight, but we advised him to think more realistically of a late 2007 trip. End Summary.

Group of Four/4 1 Agreement: Exclusive and Ineffective

¶2. (C) Although our meeting with al-Jaafari occurred prior to issuance of a communiqu by five Iraqi leaders on key legislation (reftel), he was critical of the "Group of Four" alignment and told us August 25 that at least one leader (unnamed) among the Group confided deep pessimism about its seriousness of purpose and ability to achieve meaningful progress. Al-Jaafari emphasized that he and other Da'wa elements oppose Prime Minister al-Maliki's decision to lead Da'wa into a new political grouping that has only exacerbated "the Sunni problem." Senior Fadhila Party members Hassan al-Shammari, Basim al-Sherif, and Karim al-Yakuby were unimpressed by the agreement, predicting that it would do nothing to solve Iraq's many problems and complaining that they had been given no opportunity to participate in the agreement process. They stated that Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi's Islamic Party was an unofficial but de facto member of the new leadership grouping. Without stating explicitly an intent to leave the Da'wa party, al-Jaafari maintained that he and other disaffected Da'wa cadres are exploring the formation of a new political coalition (presumably under his leadership) whose composition would be based on "vision and ability" that cuts across sectarian divides "just like selection of the Iraqi national soccer team," but he declined to identify potential partners. The Fadhila reps expressed interest in joining a new political

coalition but not an opposition front, and made clear they could support and work with former PM Ayad Allawi. Comparing Allawi's tenure positively to that of his two successors, they said that there had been little sectarian violence or Iranian meddling during Allawi's rule. Al-Shammari opined that Allawi is the only Iraqi leader who can stand up to Iran because, unlike the others, he is not beholden to Tehran. He predicted that Allawi may also find support from the Sunni Tawafuq alliance.

ISCI, Iran, and the Sadrists

13. (C) The Fadhila reps and al-Jaafari agreed that the once-powerful UIA was currently functioning in name only. Fadhila's 15 Council of Representatives members left the alliance earlier this year, and al-Shammari and his colleagues joked that the UIA was either "on life support or clinically dead." Al-Jaafari groused that the Shi'a alliance had lost cohesion due to poor management and dominance by senior alliance partner ISCI, which he characterized as the personal political vehicle of the al-Hakeem family. He likened the UIA's decline and eventual de facto domination by the al-Hakeems to that of ISCI and its predecessor SCIRI, which started out as a genuinely broad-based Shi'a coalition (he claims to have been a SCIRI founding member in 1983 as an Iran-based exile) but "over time there was nothing left but the al-Hakeem family."

14. (C) Al-Jaafari and the Fadhila reps claimed that ISCI has close ties to Iran, and the Fadhila legislators also maintained that Iran provides funding and weapons to ISCI and its affiliated Badr militia as well as to the al-Sadr movement and its Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia. Al-Shammari

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decried Iranian interference in Iraq and said that that Iran seeks to further its national interests by ensuring instability in Iraq. He identified Iran as the root of many of Iraq's problems, and expressed indignation that the GOI had done little to counter unhelpful or even hostile Iranian acts such as its shelling of Iraqi territory or the easy passage without Iraqi border guard inspection of vehicles and cargo coming from Iran. Al-Shammari predicted further internecine Shi'a violence in Southern Iraq, principally between Iran-supplied Badr and Iran-supplied JAM, and sniped that the Basrah Governor had not stopped the flow of Iranian weapons into Iraq. In the event of a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, he stated that Iran would be "America's replacement."

15. (C) The Fadhila CoR members identified Allawi as their personal choice as new PM (although they hastened to add that this was not Fadhila's official position), and asserted that Moqtada al-Sadr loyalists would likely back al-Jaafari. Asked about the Sadr movement and the possibility of increased USG engagement with reconcilable Sadrists, al-Jaafari stated that the movement is divided but still has a large number of people amenable to participation in mainstream political life but not yet ripe for USG contact. He characterized poverty and lack of jobs/services in the squalid Baghdad suburb of Sadr City as the basis not only of al-Sadr's support, but also as an opportunity for a potential GOI breakthrough. Jaafari said if the GOI could provide jobs and services to Sadr City's 3 million residents, most of whom are crammed "10 to 40 people in 1200 square foot houses," then they would abandon radical al-Sadr elements, thus isolating Sadrist hotheads for the GOI security forces to deal with. Jaafari also complained that "indiscriminate" MNF kinetic operations in Sadr City are driving unemployed young men into JAM's waiting arms. To make his point, he conducted an impromptu interview with a member of his household staff (a young male Sadr City resident) who attested to "random" MNF attacks, raids, and arrests/prolonged detentions of young male bystanders, all of which resulted in bad feelings toward the U.S. In reply to al-Jaffari's point that USG release of

small-fry Sadr City detainees could help improve the USG image among Sadrists, we offered a briefing on new USG detainee release initiatives in hopes that al-Jaafari and his associates might play a helpful role in vouching for released detainees.

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